

WILLIAM A. ROOT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is March 18, 2002. This is an interview with William A. Root. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me something about when and where you were born and something about your parents?

ROOT: I was born in Massachusetts September, 20, 1923.

Q: Where in Massachusetts?

ROOT: We lived in Hingham on the south shore just 13 miles south of Boston. My dad and mother both came from Colorado. He was at MIT and she at Wellesley, so they both were studying in Massachusetts. Dad was an architect. I had a blissful 17 years in Hingham, a lovely place.

Q: Well let's talk a little, go back with your father to begin with. Where does his family come from?

ROOT: Well his dad was an assayer (looking at minerals to see what was in them) in Colorado. That is a center of mining, of course. His father was Joseph Pomeroy Root who was ambassador to Chile.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Did the fact that you had a what was it, grandfather?

ROOT: This was my dad's grandfather, my great-grandfather.

Q: Great-grandfather was a diplomat, did that sort of ring through the generations? Did you know about it?

ROOT: Not particularly. I didn't really discover this until quite late. But I am rather proud of him.

Q: What about on your mother's side? What was her family name, and where did they come from?

ROOT: Her family name was Eppich, which evolved in the German. It had been Ebig which is pronounced about the same. Before that it was Ewig. I am sure your German is good enough to know that it means eternal. So, on my mother's side, we don't need Ponce De Leon to find the fountain of youth. We had it.

Q: How about, do you know how your mother's family got to Colorado, and what were they up to?

ROOT: Yes. My grandfather and his family were in Chicago during the Chicago fire. At that time he was very young, only about four or five years old. In the confusion he got separated from his parents for about a week. Somebody must have taken care of him. I never did find out. His mother, my great-grandmother, seeing the fire come, threw her china out the window to save it, which wasn't a very good idea. Then they moved to Colorado, where my grandfather was eventually in the real estate business. My great-grandmother wasn't very happy with Colorado. She thought this was too rustic, not as civilized as Chicago. She used to look east at Chicago and shed a few tears at what she had left behind.

Q: What was you mother studying at Wellesley.

ROOT: Well, she became a school teacher. I frankly don't know her major studies. It was probably a general academic course.

Q: Did your mother and father meet while they were at Wellesley-MIT?

ROOT: No, they went to the same high school in Denver.

Q: So you grew up in Hingham for the first 17 years. That would be up to 1940. With your father being an architect, did he specialize in any particular thing or was he a general architect or what?

ROOT: Well, he had been a member of the firm Cram and Ferguson until the depression came on. Then they let him go. There is a long story about that. Thereafter he was on his own. He did school buildings and churches mostly. He did quite a few buildings for Exeter, the boarding school in New Hampshire, and a school and a church in Hingham.

Q: What was Hingham like in the 30's and late 20's?

ROOT: Well Hingham was a bedroom community. Most of the workers went to Boston, commuted by train. My brother and I used to accompany my mother to meet the train. This was a big part of the day. When we had a visitor for Sunday dinner, the visitor as is customary asked the small boys, well what do you want to do when you grow up? My brother said he wanted to be the engineer on the train. Then he turned to me, what do I want to be? I wanted to be the passenger. I managed to achieve my ambition.

Q: You went to public schools in Hingham?

ROOT: Yes.

Q: How did you find, let's start with elementary school. How did you do in elementary school, and do you recall any of the things you were doing that you particularly liked or didn't like?

ROOT: Well, it was very pleasant, a very small south school. It was a three room school with four grades, so two of them were obviously in the same room. The principal was also the teacher of the third and fourth grade.. Then I went to Center School, which was fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, with fifth and sixth grades also in the same room. So I had two teachers for four years.

Q: How did you find sort of today, I suppose in some parts of the country it is still there, how did you find having two grades being taught in one room? Were you picking up both?

ROOT: Oh, yes. You were always listening to what the other people were doing. It was pretty informal, of course, but it worked. I actually combined first and second grade in one year, thereby being double promoted. So I had two teachers in one year, and one for two years.

Q: Were you much of a reader in those days?

ROOT: Oh, yes. What I remember most clearly is the family reading. Mom and Dad would take a book like "Les Miserables" and read it to the kids and take turns reading. It was a cozy experience.

Q: At home, was it sort of you all gathered together for evening meal and talk about things too?

ROOT: Yes. We invariably sat down as a family for breakfast and for dinner, and there was a lot of conversation.

Q: What were the family politics? This was the time of the New Deal with Roosevelt.

ROOT: The first election I remember was FDR in '32. My mother frowned on alcohol, and she couldn't quite abide this idea of repealing the 18th amendment to permit the legalization of alcohol, so she voted for Hoover rather than for FDR because of that. But, thereafter, I am sure they voted Democrat in presidential elections for years. That didn't mean they were straight Democratic voters, because there were a number of Democrats with not very savory reputations in the Boston area.

Q: Oh, yes, James Michael Curry.

ROOT: That's right. People like Saltonstall and Lodge had very good reputations. They were Republican. So I am sure my folks split their tickets.

Q: During the '30s how had the depression hit Hingham and your family?

ROOT: Well, it hit hard. My dad lost his job, and there weren't very many people looking for architects in those days. He eventually got a job with the WPA, Works Progress Administration, not with pick and shovel but a desk job. We ran up bills at the grocery store. Sooner or later you had to pay them. We knew what beans and macaroni were all about; be sure of that. But it never seemed to spoil our day.

Q: I am five years younger than you are, but I recall, everybody else is more or less in the same boat. I mean if the water was down, all the boats went down. In other words we were all living sort of the same way, so you weren't feeling particularly envious that you were left out.

ROOT: No it was just struggling to get along.

Q: You go to high school right about '35.

ROOT: '37 to '40.

Q: '37 to '40. What subjects were you particularly interested in in high school?

ROOT: I was particularly interested in math, physics, things like that. Of course we had Latin and French and English and social studies, the usual. One of the things I remember most vividly was that the algebra teacher was very new to the subject. She sensed that I was catching on pretty well, so she often deferred to me. That was amusing.

Q: While you were there, were you reading the paper at all?

ROOT: Yes, the Boston Herald. There were two things about the Boston Herald besides reading it that were memorable. One was it only cost about two cents. My dad would usually pay for it with a nickel and bring the three pennies home, and I collected pennies. The other thing was a cartoon in the Boston Herald. Dahl was the cartoonist. He was quite often the topic of the dinner conversation, what was in that cartoon. Mr. Dahl had a great deal of trouble drawing cows and bulls because he didn't know the relationship between the horns and the ears. But yes, the Boston Herald came every day, as did the Christian Science Monitor. I won't say I read them both cover to cover, but they were certainly part of the family.

Q: By the time you were in high school, what major things were happening in Europe and the far east. Were these part and parcel of what you were picking up, or were these over the horizon?

ROOT: Well it seemed a long way off. I remember one very embarrassing thing. It was right after the German occupation of France in 1940. I was in French class at the time, and one of my colleagues wrote on the blackboard, "French is a dead language." It didn't go over very well, but it is something you remember.

Q: While you were in high school, did serving abroad mean anything?

ROOT: Well, it didn't really occur to me at the time. That didn't come until much later.

Q: While you were in high school, particularly towards the end, were you seeing military service sort of hovering over your head?

ROOT: Well, that didn't happen until December 7, 1941.

Q: There was a draft before that.

ROOT: Yes, but I was too young for that. I didn't turn 18 until just before Pearl Harbor.

Q: You graduated from High school when?

ROOT: 1940.

Q: So did you go on to college?

ROOT: Yes, I went to Colorado College which is where my dad had gone before he transferred to MIT.

Q: What were you going to major in?

ROOT: I didn't know. It was a liberal arts college, and it was in Colorado which had much to speak for it. I was fascinated principally in political science, not so much the subject, but because of the professor, Edith Bramhall. A cousin of ours, Sherman Sheppard, studied under Edith Bramhall. He had nothing but praise for her. She was quite a character actually, so that is what I started majoring in. But I changed my major after Pearl Harbor to math and physics, because I figured political science wasn't exactly going to keep me out of the trenches whereas math and physics might.

Q: Were you able to graduate from Colorado College prior to military service?

ROOT: I managed to do this by enlisting in the navy in the V-7 program which encouraged finishing college first, and also by finishing a four year course in three years by going to summer school. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to graduate before military service.

Q: Well then you were in the V-7 program. Did you go directly into the navy then?

ROOT: Well there were a few months in the summer of '43 before they called me up. During those months I worked at the shipyard in Hingham. It turned out I was helping to build the very type of ship I actually served on.

Q: What were you building?

ROOT: Destroyer escorts.

Q: When you got out of the V-7 program, they took you somewhere to turn you into an ensign didn't they?

ROOT: They sent me to Northwestern midshipman school. The usual four year Annapolis course was condensed into four months. They called us 90 day wonders, but it was really 120.

Q: Having your math and science, I would imagine you weren't struggling the way liberal arts graduates might.

ROOT: It was quite presumptuous of me, but when I did switch to math and physics, primarily to stay out of the trenches, I was thinking of the last war you know, where they had trenches. World War I is what everybody remembered. I figured I would join the navy, which is relatively comfortable unless it is extremely uncomfortable, and I would become a radar officer. Radar was the great thing just coming over the horizon. That is exactly what happened. They sent me from Northwestern midshipman school to Harvard for three months for pre-radar and MIT for another four months for the radar training. So I ended up in all these ivy league schools.

Q: Tell me, I am curious. What did they teach you in radar? You know you look at the screen. Did you take the machine apart?

ROOT: This wasn't just to look at. This was so you would understand how it functioned. Basically they were preparing you to repair the stuff if it went down.

Q: So we are talking about '44 by the time you...

ROOT: Well by that time it was '44.

Q: So where did they assign you?

ROOT: After those schools they assigned me to a division of destroyer escorts. They didn't have enough radar officers one for each ship, so they assigned me to six ships. None of the six were at Pearl Harbor when I got there, so they put me on a seventh one to catch up with the other six. So I served on seven different destroyer escorts.

Q: Where did they send you?

ROOT: Well they say join the navy to see the world. I joined the navy, and I saw a lot of water. We didn't get to see much of anything. We were escorting task forces basically providing an anti submarine shield.

Q: Was this in the Pacific?

ROOT: The Pacific.

Q: How significant from your perspective was the Japanese submarine menace?

ROOT: Well to tell you the truth, we never found a Japanese submarine. We weren't terribly disappointed at that, so from personal experience I can hardly say the Japanese submarine menace was all that disconcerting, but of course, they were out there.

Q: Did you say I am curious. As a radar officer, what did you do, go from one ship to another to sort of look over and sort of see how things were going?

ROOT: Well, yes. There were enlisted seamen who were technicians, and they could generally keep things going. They knew much more about the radios and things like that than I did because I skipped from knowing absolutely nothing about electronics to this sophisticated radar. Anything in between was a blank to me. But I remember once my ego was bolstered because we were out there on the ocean. The navy communicates with these flags you know. The flag signal said send Root over with the mail. Our ship had been to port more recently than the rest of them, so we had mail for these other ships. So we pulled up alongside and threw a rope over. It is called a breeches buoy, sort of like a gunny sack with two holes. You put your feet in, and they throw the duffel bag on top of you and they start a pulley arrangement to move you from one ship to the other. The ships were rocking like this. I looked down and one minute it was 20 feet at least to the water, and the next minute my feet would be in the water. I got over to the other ship without any mishap. My first question was, "What is wrong with the radar? Why are you so anxious to have me over here?" "Well nothing is wrong with the radar. The commodore wants a fourth for bridge." But there was a time when my work on the radar was appreciated. We were in the midst of a typhoon.

Q: Is this the great typhoon that Halsey...

ROOT: That's right the great typhoon. Hundreds of ships out there, and the order came to break ranks. Normally we were in rigid formation. We would have to be exactly so far from this ship and so forth. But the weather got so bad that the commander knew that each ship or type of ship could weather it in a different manner. So we broke ranks and, of course, that made it particularly important to have radar so you knew where the other ships were. Our surface radar took that moment to quit. Fortunately the air search radar, which only goes into the air, would pick up ships because we were rocking so heavily. So it wasn't that we couldn't find the ships; we just used the air search for it. But imagine trying to repair this delicate electronic surface search instrument when you were rocking about 45 or 50 degrees. But we managed to fix it.

Q: Well, it was very dangerous. A number of destroyer escorts went down, didn't they?

ROOT: Well, probably. We didn't hear much about what was happening unless it was on our ship.

Q: Well, I think there is a good portrayal of this in the movie the Caine Mutiny.

ROOT: My wife likes to tell people that, although it took six ships to happen, I experienced everything that is in that Caine Mutiny story. We had a crazy skipper; we ran aground. Everything happened that shouldn't have happened.

Q: I hope when you ran aground it wasn't your radar that contributed.

ROOT: No. Radar can't stop you from running aground.

Q: If you are running straight towards a volcano or something. How did you like the navy life?

ROOT: Well it served its purpose. I did my little bit and was not in the trenches, and I lived well. It was reasonably challenging to be working on something complicated, but it got pretty boring after awhile. I decided while I was out there that, after the war, the real problem our country was going to face was getting along with the Soviet Union. That is when I started thinking about international affairs. It wasn't until then. So the navy treated me well, but not to the point that I wanted to stay with it.

Q: Were you and your colleagues getting cranked up for the invasion of Japan before they dropped the atomic bombs?

ROOT: Yes. We didn't know it. We sensed that we probably were. We certainly had no prospects of returning to the States until the war with Japan was over.

Q: Did you get involved in any of the actual landings, such as Okinawa?

ROOT: No, we didn't get there.

Q: You were fortunate because the small ships took quite a beating, as did the radar picket ships.

ROOT: Since I was moved from ship to ship, I managed to time my moves quite conveniently in hindsight. Two of the six were hit by kamikaze, and I didn't happen to be on them at the time.

Q: When did you get out of the service?

ROOT: '46.

Q: Were you married by this time?

ROOT: I got married in '45.

Q: How did you meet your wife and what was her background?

ROOT: I met her at Northwestern when I was at midshipman school in '43. She was on the Evanston campus, and I was on the Chicago campus. We never would have met except that my mother went to high school with her house mother. My mother said, "Be sure to look up Hazel Haines," which didn't strike me as something I wanted to do right away, but I did eventually. That is where I met my wife to be.

Q: What was her field?

ROOT: Journalism, she was in journalism school.

Q: So in 1946 you are married and out of the service. What or whither?

ROOT: Then the GI Bill sent me to Columbia for the Russian Institute and the School of International Affairs.

Q: That was probably one of only one or two places you could study Russian at that point.

ROOT: That is right.

Q: You went to Columbia for how long?

ROOT: Two years.

Q: How did you find the teachers? The cold war was just beginning to heat up. Where were the people, I assume many of them had a Russian background and all. What were they teaching?

ROOT: Well, my mentor was a chap named John Hazard who was the first fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs to be sent to Moscow to study law. In fact I think he is the only one who has gone to Moscow to study law. He was great. He sensed the politics and he knew prejudices that were in the class. He started out his class with a statement along the following lines. He said, "Of course I appreciate that none of you are going to change your opinions as a result of this class. We all know that we have formed our opinions by the age of 15. Thereafter we go through life documenting them." This, of course, was a challenge to prove him wrong. It certainly opened up our minds. Then Philip Moseley was on the foreign affairs, foreign policy side of the Russian picture. He was pretty much a hawk. Hazard was looking at it from the domestic legal point of view inside of Soviet governmental institutions. Then there was Burgess on economics. He was looking at it academically. It wasn't communism versus capitalism, but rather how does it really work. Then Ernie Simmons on literature and Gerard Robinson on history. He was a real authority. But, except for Moseley, I didn't sense any of them as being particularly ideological.

Q: You were taking Russian then I assume too.

ROOT: I started studying Russian while I was still in the navy in San Francisco. So when I got to Columbia I entered into the second semester. In retrospect, this was a mistake. I should have started all over again. Unfortunately, the State Department never sent me to Russia on tour, so I never had the chance to use this Russian that I had worked so hard on. Of course after a few decades, it gets awfully rusty.

Q: You graduated from there it would be '48 I guess. Of course this is the year when the cold war really started going with the Berlin airlift and...

ROOT: Yes, I received my Master of International Affairs and Russian Institute certificate in 1948.

Q: Well then the Czech coup was '48 wasn't it?

ROOT: That's right.

Q: So, what were you planning to do with your Soviet studies, Russian study?

ROOT: I wanted to get into international affairs in the government. I started out in the Bureau of the Budget in the International Activities Branch. I found that this was a wonderful way to start a government career on the civil side. It is a pretty heady experience. The phone rings; you pick it up and say, "Executive Office of the President." But you do get a wonderful perspective on how many people are involved in international affairs, not just the State Department by any means.

Q: Well, what particular slice of the pie were you given?

ROOT: In the Bureau of the Budget the International Activities Branch had only about eight or ten people, so we all were concerned with a broad range of subjects. The Bureau reviewed administrative management questions and legislative proposals as well as budgets. I was reviewing the Point Four program which Truman initiated. But most of the time I was reviewing budget proposals from the agencies, particularly the State Department.

Q: Within the Bureau of the Budget, what was the reputation of in the late 40's, the State Department, how it was managed and used its money and all?

ROOT: Well, it was our job to be skeptical. Therefore we did not put the State Department on a pedestal and say you are so smart we don't need to look at your budget. At the same time, it got to me after awhile. Here I was still wet behind the ears, a GS-5 or 6, a real low level bureaucrat, and putting Assistant Secretaries of State through their paces: Why do you need a million dollars for this or \$100,000 for that? So after a couple of years, I thought the thing to do was transfer to the State Department, get some experience there, find out what it was really like, and then go back. I did transfer to the State Department in May 1950, after two years in the Bureau of the Budget. About ten years later, in between State Department assignments, by which time I had become a Foreign Service Officer, I went back to the Bureau of the Budget and said, "Well, here I am Put me to work." The response was: "Oh, we can't touch you; you are tainted. You are a Foreign Service Officer. You can't be expected to be objective." I thought this was a little sad.

Q: Yes, it speaks of bias up and down the line. What about, your first job in 1950. When you went to the State Department, what were you doing?

ROOT: I was in the European bureau executive office. At that time NATO was just getting going, and I was put to work on administrative management questions having to do with NATO.

Q: You were a civil servant at that point. What was the role of a civil servant in the European bureau?

ROOT: In those days virtually everybody in Washington in the State Department was civil service. The Foreign Service was just that; they were foreign. They were outside of the country. Therefore the concept of civil service versus foreign service in Washington didn't arise. The foreign service people were out there someplace. They were receiving our instructions.

Q: If you were concerned about being in the Bureau of the Budget and telling people what to do, did the same thinking hit you as far as being a Washington-based civil servant sending instructions out to people who were in a foreign country and obviously, I mean it is a different game.

ROOT: You are quite correct. The same reaction took place in '52. Even though I was still civil service, I was sent to Germany on assignment. This was most unusual. It was called the exchange program. Once in awhile there would be exceptions made, foreign here, civil service here. They gave me a Foreign Service Staff rating of some sort, and I went out to the High Commission for Germany to work in the executive office there.

Q: This is in Frankfurt at that time?

ROOT: No, it had just moved to Bonn.

Q: So you were in Bonn from...

ROOT: '52 to '55. During this period my principal task was to tell people it was time to go home. We were winding up; the occupational functions were being transferred gradually to the Germans. The State Department had taken over occupational functions from the Army just a few years before that. At the time I went, there were more State Department American personnel in Germany than in the rest of the world combined. This couldn't last, of course, especially since the Germans were, not so slowly, taking over these functions. The way it worked we identified roughly half of these numerous Americans who should be sent home. Most of them figured well, not quite yet. We have not quite finished what we set out to do. And they would appeal this directive. Half of the appeals were successful, and the other half were not. That meant that instead of cutting by half, we only cut by a quarter. Six months later you did it all over again. I was there for three years. I was on my sixth round of this sort of thing when I identified my own job as surplus and went home.

Q: Was the problem that the bureaucracy had become so entrenched or was it the individuals? In those days somebody working for the American government in Germany was living fairly well.

ROOT: We lived very well. After all we were an occupying force. We had occupation funds as well as appropriated funds to support us. We were living in what was known as the golden ghetto, which has its downside as well. You don't get to know the local people very well if you are just hobnobbing with Americans. But many of the Americans in Germany at that time had been there since the end of the war, some even before that. Yes, it had become a way of life, and they knew that when they went back home the lifestyle would be less high off the hog.

Q: During the time you were there, an embassy took over from the High Commission, didn't it?

ROOT: There was no embassy when I arrived. There was a U.S. High Commission for Germany. Of course there were British and French counterparts. It was called U.S. HICOG. The top dog was not an ambassador, he was a high commissioner. Now, by the time I left, that was phased into an embassy. It wasn't that the embassy took over. HICOG simply became the embassy.

Q: Who was the high commissioner when you arrived?

ROOT: McCloy.

Q: And Conant who had been a Harvard Professor, Harvard president of great distinction. Did that make a difference with Conant taking over from a military man? Did that sort of set a different tone?

ROOT: Yes, although at my level, we didn't have that much to do with high commissioners, so it didn't make too much difference. But I think there was a different tone. I remember one particular. In going through the roster of positions trying to decide which ones we didn't need any longer, there was an office of scientific affairs, a science advisor. One of the appeals from that office went as far as Conant. He said, he didn't think he needed a science advisor, so in that sense it made a difference.

Q: Did you keep any impression during the time you were there of the development of the German government, or was it a pretty benign handover to German authority?

ROOT: Well Adenauer's star was rising rapidly. He had a very high reputation. The friction in the handover was caused more by American officials, understandably, wanting to finish what they had started and make sure that things didn't get dropped between the cracks. Were the Germans really going to proceed with decartelization and deconcentration, things like that, that we thought were so important.

Q: Did you sense though, a change in everything because the beginning of the Korean War in 1950 and all. All of a sudden Germany and Japan became sort of our staunch allies. I mean they became far more important objects of changing them over into democratic countries and all. They were on the front line against communism.

ROOT: By the time I got to Germany in '52, of course the Marshall Plan was well underway. It had started about four years before that. The transition from enemy status to object of reconstruction assistance had been accomplished. A few years later Germany became an ally in NATO; but that was after the Korean 1953 armistice. There were occasions when there were mixed feelings. For instance my brother was shot down over Normandy. It was Germans who shot him down. Well it was their job to do it. You can't fault them particularly, but it is hard to put that behind you.

Q: Did you get any feel for why we had this contingent of brand new foreign service officers who went out as kreis resident officers, kreis being about the county level, to take over from the army to act as a transition. Did you get any feel about how effective they were?

ROOT: I am sure there was tremendous variation in effectiveness, just as one would expect wide variations among people. But it really wasn't put to the test particularly after my arrival because the KRO positions were being eliminated.

Q: Were you seeing signs or indicators of Nazism?

ROOT: No. But I think that our living situation was not conducive to seeing signs one way or the other. We were surrounded by our own folk. Especially in administrative jobs such as my own. My wife and I did get out to meet Germans socially, but not through official capacity. We joined a local church, that sort of thing, but there was almost no way we would have become aware of a resurgence of Nazism which is one of the problems of the way we were living.

Q: Well in '53, was it '53?

ROOT: '52-'55.

Q: In 1955 what happened?

ROOT: In '55 as I say, I finally identified my own job as excess and went home and went back to the European bureau. I should say in '54 the Wriston Program had come along which resulted in my becoming a Foreign Service Officer without the messiness of taking the exam or anything of that sort. So this time when I went back to Washington, I was a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: What level?

ROOT: Oh, dear, four or five, I guess.

Q: When you came back, what did they put you to doing?

ROOT: I became a budget officer for the European bureau. The next four years I was running the budget for Europe.

Q: How important is the budget in a regional bureau? and how does this work?

ROOT: Well it is much more important than the high officials of the bureau would recognize. We had big issues such as whether to build a new building for NATO in Paris which would cost millions of dollars, but the kinds of issues we got from the top brass were, the consul general in Bermuda wants an air mail subscription to the New York Times, and we think that if it was sent by surface mail we could maybe save \$100. He doesn't really need it by air mail, although they might take the opposite approach. But it was that kind of issue, or whether the ambassador in Copenhagen should get \$10,000 rather than \$8,000 for the representation allowance. These were piddling things, but they hit home to the perks for the more senior officers, and that is what they thought were the budget issues. The biggest budget issue I had was working on Eleanor Dulles. She was very keen on Berlin, helping Berlin get back on its feet. She wanted to build a hospital in Berlin and a conference hall. Of course, what she wanted to do generally happened. But in terms of finding the money and making sure she didn't exceed statutory authority, that was something else again. So I did my best to keep her out of jail.

Q: Well how did you deal with Eleanor Dulles? She sort of, people I have talked to said she sort of insinuated herself over everyone else, the authority over Berlin and kept this for a long time. She would sort of appear and you don't see any particular control over her.

ROOT: Well, there wasn't. But she was good hearted, and Berliners of course, loved her. It might have been a little excess expenditure on a conference hall and hospital, especially on the conference hall perhaps. I don't think the hospital money was at all mis-spent. It wasn't as if she was trying to run everything. She had her sights on particular projects, and she had her say usually with those.

Q: Who were the heads of the European bureau when you were there, and how did they operate with you or work with you?

ROOT: Well, Burke Elbrick was Assistant Secretary for Europe and Art Stevens was the executive director to whom I reported. I didn't have all that much to do with Mr. Elbrick unless it was an air mail subscription and that sort of issue. Seriously there wasn't. At my then level, you don't hobnob with the assistant secretary very much.

Q: Did you see this '55 to '59 period I mean sort of working on a diminishing role for the United States certainly with personnel within the European context or not?

ROOT: Well we certainly were not picking up positions in droves. We attempted something known as full staffing. The army, of course, the military in general had many more people than they had operational positions, and the excess is always in training someplace. The State Department didn't. So the State Department sent some to training and left some positions vacant. Not only that, even if it weren't for training, home leave or just the time between assignments when they were packing up, that sort of thing, there would invariably be vacancies because we didn't have more people than positions. So we calculated the number of people we would need to keep the positions filled and made a budget pitch for that which didn't go over very well on the hill. That much I remember, but it wasn't as if we were being cut back severely. That happened much later.

Q: Did you get involved in the budget process with Congressman John Rooney?

ROOT: Oh, of course.

Q: Will you talk about your perspective of his dealings?

ROOT: He delighted in giving us a hard time, and he was knowledgeable enough that his questions hit close to the bone. So one did a lot of work to prepare for a hearing before John Rooney. Sometimes it paid off; but sometimes you can't anticipate what he was going to ask. Yes, he was a memorable legislator.

Q: Within the European bureau were there sort of country priorities, you know give France everything it needs; give Germans nine-tenths of what it needs, and give Italy three-fourths? In other words, was there a pecking order budgetwise in the European Bureau?

ROOT: Well, in '55 the dominance of Germany in the budget was much reduced, but it was still there. There was a tendency Germany has had its share, now it is somebody else's turn. To that extent, yes. We had other types of crises, for instance the visa mills in Frankfurt and in Canada required adequate staffing in order to avoid insufferable delays. So, priorities were sometimes give to relatively non-political type jobs.

Q: How about France? We had some pretty powerful ambassadors in France at that time. Were they able to weigh in and get what they wanted?

ROOT: Interestingly enough, not all powerful ambassadors wanted more people. Indeed, some ambassadors prided themselves on having fewer people. I remember John Tuthill, I have forgotten what year this was, but I think it was a year he went to Brazil.

Q: He went to Brazil in operation topsy.

ROOT: He was one of those who thought people tripping over themselves and we had more than we needed. So, not all the high powered people were grasping for more. It was interesting that way.

Q: Well did you find yourself sorting out and saying giving Spain or Portugal less emphasis than France or Germany?

ROOT: In budget terms this came up really in only two ways. One was to sort out positions either in terms we got ten more positions in the budget this year; where are they going to go? Because we probably had asked for 40 and couldn't meet all 40 demands. Or maybe the reverse, you had money for only ten fewer than you had, and who was going to get cut? If it was the latter, the easiest way to cut is by attrition, so you wait for vacancies to occur, and then you just don't fill them, which is not a very wise way to proceed, but it is the easy way. The other budget issue is for expenses other than personnel. What happens there is that imaginative administrative officers in the embassies will come in with requests for their allotments to be increased substantially in order to meet this or that need. There wouldn't be enough money for this, but about three weeks before the end of the fiscal year, you discover that some allotments are not being spent, so you pull them back. The name of the game in the budget was to get this money out to where it could productively be spent, which wasn't always, you know, how productive was it. Sometimes it looked like any way you could get it spent so you wouldn't have to give it back to the treasury. I am afraid sometimes it was more that.

Q: Was the eastern bloc and the Soviet Union part of your area?

ROOT: Oh, yes.

Q: Well this must have, what was the top priority?

ROOT: Well in budget terms there were special needs especially because of security considerations which epitomized the second category of the budget issue, the non-personnel side. Other than that it wasn't a budget issue particularly.

Q: Did you sense you were there when the move between, well the Eisenhower administration was already in when you came there, is that right?

ROOT: Yes. It was '52-'60, so it was well going on. Incidentally when he was first elected in '52 and I was in Germany, I discovered I was disenfranchised. If I had been in the military, I could have voted, but being in the State Department I couldn't. I complained bitterly and wrote to the Maryland authorities and congressmen and so forth. I am sure others did too, but by '56 that had been fixed. But it is quite amazing that as late as '52 State Department people overseas could not vote.

Q: Was it the law, I mean you had absentee ballots.

ROOT: You couldn't. I know it seems hard to imagine.

Q: It really does.

ROOT: But of course it has been over 50 years, and that has been fixed.

Q: Well as you looked at this did you see yourself sort of staying in the budget and fiscal side of the State Department or..

ROOT: Well I had an open mind. It is an interesting question because in '59 I was assigned to Copenhagen as economics officer. The buildup to that was fascinating. Art Stevens, who was the executive director, was an adventuresome type. He loved to go to exotic places and do imaginative things. Being executive director, he was forever being importuned to by persons wanting a particular position. He told his staff of one of his reactions. He had just been pressured by someone who wanted to go to Copenhagen. He said, he couldn't imagine why anyone would want to go to Copenhagen. It would be like swimming in whipped cream. In '59 the personnel office had me tentatively assigned to about 15 places. For one reason or another they all fell apart. It was fascinating because I was doing research on all these 15 places, living vicariously all over the world. Finally they called me up and said, "We think now we really have an assignment for you. It is in Copenhagen." Just having heard the whipped cream story I had the following conversation with my personnel officer. "Let's get this straight. You have asked me if I want to go to Copenhagen, right?" "That's right." "I didn't ask you if I could go to Copenhagen did I?" "No, you didn't." "In that case I would be delighted." As for the economic assignment, I think this was part of the department's policy to provide officers with diversification in their experience. It was a little amusing because economics 101 at the Columbia School of International Affairs was the only course I had to take twice. Anyhow, such an assignment to a small embassy like Copenhagen was ideal because the economic section was so small that even a junior economic officer gets into everything. I should tell you what happened when I arrived. The first thing one does on arrival at a post is to pay one's respects to the ambassador. Val Peterson, a political appointee, ex-governor of Nebraska, ex-civil defense chief, was ambassador in Copenhagen then. He greeted me with, "So you are the new economics officer." "That is correct." "Well what is economics anyway?" I wasn't quite prepared for this, but I decided it was a serious question and it needed a serious answer. I took a few moments to collect my thoughts. Before I could said anything it turned out it was really a rhetorical question. He said, "I'll tell you. Everything is economics." There was a pregnant pause. "Until it becomes important, and then it is politics." I interpreted this to be his way of telling me not to be surprised if the political section takes over something you have been working on because it has become a hot potato. Sure enough that happened, but there wee so many fascinating issues that they couldn't handle everything anyway. For that reason, among many others, it was a wonderful place to be.

Q: You were there from...

ROOT: '59 to '63.

Q: '59 to '63. What was the political-economic situation in Denmark when you got there in '59?

ROOT: Well you ask a Dane and invariably sooner or later they will say "You must remember we are such a small country." Of course they are, but they are more important than this denigration would suggest, because they do have a vote in various international fora. From the perspective of an economic officer we got involved in such things as the chicken war. We wanted to sell chickens, and they wanted to raise their own chickens.

Q: These were the frozen chickens.

ROOT: That sort of thing. This wasn't entirely an easy argument for us to make because the American grain exporters loved exporting American grain to the Danish chicken growers, but the American chicken exporters wanted to export the chickens instead of the grain, and so it goes.

Q: Well the chicken war was the major opening gun of the conflict which continues today between the agricultural sectors of the United States and Europe. Did you find how responsive were the Danes to our pleas on the chicken wars?

ROOT: Not particularly. But as I say, since the U.S. grain exporters were delighted, we perhaps didn't push it with as much vigor as we might have.

Q: Did you get involved with the Danes on export controls on things going to the Soviet Union?

ROOT: Yes. Indeed sometimes we were asked to make end use checks to see if something on the strategic list that had been sent to a Danish importer from the States was being used where it was supposed to be used. This got very dicey because the local authorities didn't particularly like American officials delving into private enterprise in Denmark. So we attempted to work in tandem with the local authorities. That was the kind of issue we ran into.

Q: Did you get involved as an economic officer, did this include trade promotion too?

ROOT: Oh, yes. We were encouraged to give that priority. We had a commercial section and a commercial officer. I wasn't the commercial officer, but worked along with him. This is before Commerce had its own foreign commercial service, we had the same people doing that work.

Q: You notice dinner products were a big export from Denmark weren't they? Did they go mainly to Britain or did they go to the United States?

ROOT: Well a lot of it was going to the United States in the form of food products for U.S. forces in Germany. As a matter of fact, the State Department American personnel in Denmark were only about 10 or 15% of the total official U.S. government personnel in Denmark. There were all kinds of hangers-on including the veterinarian detachment from the army who was making sure that the Danish products passed inspections before they went to Germany. We had a coast guard detachment. We had a little of everything.

Q: Did you get any feel for relations between the Danes and the Germans at this point?

ROOT: Oh, yes. We did quite a bit of traveling within Denmark. One of the fascinating things about language was the closer you got to the German border, the more Danish sounded like German. The closer you got to the Swedish border, it sounded like Swedish. The closer you got to England, it sounded like English. Of course it wasn't, but there were these accents that you saw. Also the Danes, of course, knew how close their language was to German, but they didn't like to be reminded of it. If an American would refer to the capital city of Denmark as Copenhagen, they would say oh now it is Copenhagen (long a). Of course they don't say either. They say Kobenhavn they swallow it. Copenhagen is very close to the German Kopenhagen; whereas the English usually give it the long a for Copenhagen. These are the things that you learned that were sensitivities- you had better believe it - about the not so long ago German occupation.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Danish officials?

ROOT: They were delightful. In fact it is awfully hard to find anything pejorative or negative to say about an experience in a lovely place like Denmark. You could complain about the weather, but the people were really friendly. They would often remind you how small the country was. In other words don't expect us to pull your chestnuts out of the fire. Perhaps that is a way of saying don't expect us to increase our share of the burden, which was one of the favorite topics in those days. The Americans wanted the Europeans to spend more on defense, that sort of thing.

Q: Was there much cooperation among the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark?

ROOT: Yes, one of the more interesting negotiations that took place while I was there was civil aviation. It was a Scandinavian group, not just a Danish group, the SAS, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. There were two fascinating aspects of that. One was the language they used to communicate among themselves. When they had their delegation meeting, they did not speak Danish or Norwegian or Swedish. They spoke English amongst themselves. But the other aspect had to do with a debate over a rather esoteric point having to do with fourth freedom. In other words can a U.S. airline carry passengers from Denmark to Germany. There was great debate over the words. We were using an English text of the bilateral agreement. Having invested quite a bit of effort in trying to learn the Danish language, I got out the Danish version of the same agreement. The Danish version supported the American position much better than the English version did. I made this point, and they didn't appreciate that. But it sort of made the study of the language all worthwhile.

Q: Were the Finns part of any Scandinavian activity?

ROOT: Well, they were not part of SAS. Finnair is separate, not part of SAS. So in that sense, no. There were Scandinavian efforts at sometimes divorcing themselves from unpopular political aspects that the Americans or perhaps the rest of Europe were pushing, but these never got very far. Of course, the Norwegians are rather independent minded, but at the end of the day they would cooperate in whatever the issue is.

Q: Were you there when the Kennedy administration came in? Did that make a difference?

ROOT: Well, in my own reaction to the American political scene, I, like millions of others was fascinated by this new young face and the great spirit that he brought with him. As to whether it made a difference to the Danes, I think they too on that level were fascinated by the Kennedy phenomenon. It wasn't so much that they were unhappy with Ike, but Ike was kind of hands off. He let the establishment run with it. Whereas, Kennedy was very much hands on. Not that we felt it way out in Copenhagen very much, but the vibrations were felt.

Q: How about living in Denmark? I am told that the Danes in a way delightful people, they are a really hard people to get to know. Did you find that?

ROOT: Yes. As for living in Denmark, the first problem we faced was finding a place to live. There was practically nothing available for rent that was within our quarters allowance. We had by that time, a family of four kids. We were staying in a hotel for week after week. Finally, just to see what the inside of a Danish house looked like, we followed up on some for sale ads. The inevitable happened. We found a house that was just what we wanted. We bought it. This is most unusual for the foreign service. We were advised strongly against it because, when you are transferred out, you are forced to sell. As a matter of fact four years later it had appreciated almost a hundred percent. It was by no means a negative experience, but in this sense we found ourselves in a well established neighborhood. We went out of our way to get to know our neighbors. They responded courteously, with some surprise actually that we would approach them this way. One of them explained it this way. He said, 'You know the people on the other side of us. They came here 35 years ago. We know all about them, what they do and what their children do. Of course we never talk to them.' The explanation is Denmark is such a small country and so few families that if you get too close socially pretty soon you are obligated socially to so many people. Most Danes are either Hansens or Jensens or you know, that sort of thing. So they keep their distance. This takes a physical form sometimes with a little hedge around. Even in the cemetery there is a little hedge around the graves. It is quite amazing. Yes, they do have that reputation and they know it, and they jealously guard it.

Q: How did you find on sort of the economic side, you know, sort of as you went to the various ministries, were you able to get pretty good figures, statistics, information, that sort of thing?

ROOT: Certainly compared with farther east, we would get a lot better information than from a government that didn't want to cooperate. But the data were not always reliable in the sense that they were not telling us what we wanted to find out. Sometimes the data would be not forthcoming because negotiations in an area such as aviation make us particularly want to know that data that would support our position in such a negotiation. But other than that it was a pretty open society. You could get data pretty easily.

Q: Did landing rights play a big role?

ROOT: Well, the Danes were not happy with receiving nuclear powered ships. This was a big issue for a long time. But as for aircraft, they were governed by these bilateral aviation agreements. Landing rights for something not covered by the agreement, that is something else again. Of course if it were an emergency, then there are emergency rules. If it was a charter aircraft, then you have to negotiate it, and if it was for military purposes you had to negotiate that too. But we weren't in a shooting war in those years, so I didn't experience that problem.

Q: What about Greenland?

ROOT: Greenland was one of those issues that became sufficiently important that it was political. Nevertheless, there were some economic aspects that we followed. One of our most pleasurable activities was folk dancing. We joined a Danish folk dance group. One of the reasons it was pleasurable was that the dancers, unlike most Danes, didn't speak English. So it gave us a chance to practice our Danish. It is customary to change partners. After one such dance the young lady looked at me, "Are you from Greenland?" in Danish. She thought I must be from Greenland because my Danish was such that I couldn't possibly be from Denmark. The only other part of the world where they speak Danish was Greenland.

Q: Did the Soviets, the fact that the East Germans were sitting pretty close to Denmark, did that intrude at all on what we were doing in Denmark at that particular time?

ROOT: Well there was a ferry between Denmark and Warnemünde in East Germany. There were issues there as to whether that was an avenue or leakage for the East Germans to escape, that sort of thing. The export control issues were mostly a West German-East German issue. The West Germans were insistent on being dominant in determining issues of trade with East Germany. There were no great issues that arose because of East Germany, just these little side things.

Q: How about American investment and trade opportunities in Greenland? Were there many?

ROOT: In Greenland?

Q: Not in Greenland; I mean in Denmark.

ROOT: Yes there were. We often had visitors who it was our privilege to show around. I remember one congressman came, and he wanted an appointment at Phillips. I explained that Phillips was in the Netherlands, not in Denmark. "Oh, no," he said, "it is Denmark." So we found him a Phillips in Denmark and took him around. Of course, it was not the Phillips he wanted to see. Afterwards, he said, "You were right." Some times the interest was not as well informed as it should be. But there was great interest in investments, particularly in shipping and agriculture.

Q: Well you left there in '63. Whither?

ROOT: Whither? The Industrial College of the Armed Forces. I got a year sabbatical.

Q: You did this from '63 to '64. How did this...

ROOT: Called ICAF.

Q: How did you find this?

ROOT: Well there were three of us there from the State Department. All the rest were military. It was a broadening experience. They had very good speakers. It was just as good a program as the war college. The war college has a reputation of getting top notch speakers. We got the same people. Not only that, but we had a foreign trip at the end of the year. I didn't find the exercise about writing a paper particularly enlightening. The idea was, in fact the directive was to pick a subject about which you don't know anything so that you can learn something about it. So I picked Chinese population about which I knew absolutely nothing, and did a lot of research and wrote what I found on 3x5 cards. I had hundreds of these cards and shuffled them until it made a coherent story. I gave credit for each of the quotes. The response was: "We can't accept this; there is none of your own work here." I said, "Why do you want to know my opinion about a subject about which I know nothing?" So I took it back and decided what I could accept as my own. What was even worse was the experience on computers. This was the early days of computers, but they thought it was time we learned about computers. The class was divided into groups called companies. Each company was given so much capital and so much inventory. You set the price for your product in each of the territories, how much money you were going to put into research and development and how much into marketing, all those good things. The computer was so slow that you didn't find out until next morning how well you did versus the competition. It soon became apparent the higher the price you put on the product, the better off you were doing. It struck me that this was rather anti social and probably not very good from the standpoint of how the real world works either. So I asked, "What is the value in the computer program for the factor relating sales volume to price?" "Oh, we can't tell you that. It would give you an untoward advantage, a competitive advantage." So I waited until it was over. By that time it was obvious that the highest price did better. Finally they said, "We really didn't want to pressure IBM because they provided this for free." Although they gave me a lot of data from the software, they omitted the one factor I had requested. By that time I knew pretty much what it was. I thought that this was no way to teach how computers work. It would have been far better if there was a preliminary seminar at which we would learn what the software is going to do and how the market works. Then you go back and make your decisions or, failing that, tell you at the end of the day what the computer was doing to you. What it really did was give you the impression that the computer knows better than you do.

Q: Well those were the early days of computers

ROOT: But I am afraid there is some of that going on now, too.

Q: Absolutely. Well, '64 whither?

ROOT: '64. One of the other two in the ICAF experience from the State Department had been working in the office of East West Trade. While we were still in ICAF he learned that the State man and the Commerce man at COCOM had done the unforgivable. They had revealed the agency differences in an international meeting before all the other foreign delegations. So they were both relieved of their duties. This meant that there was a vacancy in the office of East West Trade. The chap who had come from that office thought I might enjoy it. So I inquired if the position was available. It was. The personnel office said you don't want to work there, noting that export controls was an obsolete topic. The personnel office proposed that I be assigned to Toronto as commercial officer, explaining that U.S. companies did more business in that consular district than in any other. I thought to myself that U.S. companies did not need much help from a U.S. Government official to do business in Canada. Much later Canadian officials told me that they really do need a knowledge of Canadian rules and regulations, but I wasn't aware of it at the time. I decided to take the East-West Trade job anyway, and I never regretted it. It seems that, whenever there is a crisis anywhere in the world, sooner or later, it is usually sooner, somebody thinks the thing to do is to impose a new export control, or sanction, in order to set things to right. So that is where I ended up for several years.

Q: Okay, I think this is a good place to stop because this comes to a very important area. So we are going to pick this up in 1964 when you move into east-west trade controls. What bureau was that?

ROOT: Economic and Business. It started out just being Economic, but Business was added later.

Q: Okay, next time we will pick it up in 1964 when you moved to this job.

Today is April 19, 2002. Tomorrow, by the way is Adolf Hitler's birthday if that means anything to you. In 1964 you went into the EB Bureau, is that correct?

ROOT: That is correct.

Q: What was your initial job there?

ROOT: I was part of the East-West Trade office. I was concerned with representing the government in COCOM, the allied organization to coordinate export controls.

Q: Now at that time, I was interviewing Victor Kolas yesterday, and he was doing it in tariffs at some point. At that point it was quite overt. Was this overt at that point?

ROOT: This was overt.

Q: Did you have any particular aspect of this?

ROOT: Well, just before I came, the Commerce man and the State man who had been doing it before were relieved of their responsibilities.

Q: Was this because they...

ROOT: They had shown the poor judgment of disagreeing with each other in the open meeting. So by the time I came along, there really was no one else except another chap from Commerce who was a technical expert. Although I had some technical background, I wouldn't want to claim to be a technical expert in these things. But he and I, strangely with very little assistance even from the Defense Department, spent months in Paris at the COCOM List Review.

Q: You know, having interviewed so many people on so many issues now, and would you get into matters of trade, you end up with three camps. You have got the Department of Defense, who just doesn't want to let anything go, you know, I mean because everything erasers can be used somehow to further the Soviet cause if they get into the wrong hands. Commerce would basically want us to open up markets and sell, and then the State Department is in the middle trying to be a little more liberal than the Defense Department, and you all have these assigned roles. Was this a factor when you were there?

ROOT: Well, of course, those elements were present. What you describe is somewhat of an oversimplification. One found hard nosed people in Commerce and at State, and soft nosed people at Defense. But nevertheless the institutional bias was what you describe, and it is what you would expect. The Defense people were there to make sure the exports didn't undercut our defenses. That was their job, so you really couldn't fault them for it. It was the job of Commerce to administer the controls fairly, and certainly to make sure they weren't undermined. But, at the same time, if they didn't make too much sense economically, they would not hesitate to point that out. State, as you point out, was often in the middle. More recently it hasn't been so much in the middle; it has turned somewhat to the right. But when I was there, we were primarily concerned with smoothing relations with our allies, which was what the State Department was all about.

Q: Within the State Department, were you pretty well left to your own devices or did you get much direction?

ROOT: Yes. My job was not typical at all. Most State jobs are not as operational as this was, where you were actually putting together lists and reviewing cases. As a result, it didn't quite fit the standard role of a State Department officer. If there was an issue that couldn't be resolved at my level, it was sometimes difficult to get the higher echelons to focus on it.

Q: There must have been so many of things you were trying to get cleared. For example, you wouldn't know what a gas turbine did. Probably the person at the Department of Defense wouldn't be that familiar with a gas turbine. There is such a technical overlay on every decision you made.

ROOT: There is a technical overlay. As you point out, government officials seldom have the technical knowledge in depth necessary to really understand what that gas turbine was all about, but the issues often narrowed in on a particular commodity for a particular destination. You heard the expert opinions, over and over again sometimes, so even the non-expert pretty soon had a pretty good understanding of what the issue was. Even though we perhaps didn't know how the gas turbine worked, we knew that the issue was its military use, and perhaps the other side hadn't achieved that technology. That was the other thing learned. I found it quite surprising that it didn't take a great deal of research to know at least as much as the persons on the other side of the table, which was just as well.

Q: Well now, you are saying that part of your function was to keep the allies all together. We are talking about NATO at this point and Japan.

ROOT: Japan, yes.

Q: You know when you look at this, the roles particularly of such countries as Sweden and Argentina were important. I would think we weren't in any position to stop them from getting any of these things were we?

ROOT: Well not in a formal sense. They were not members of the organization, but we often leaned on them anyway, and they often were suppliers to our Defense Department who didn't want to ruffle feathers unduly, so there was a degree of cooperation which was much more than one would have expected.

Q: Well now, you went back and forth to Geneva and Paris. Can you think of any issues that really got everybody worked up?

ROOT: Well, yes, to Paris but not to Geneva. Communications and computers got things worked up. Those weren't the only ones. Machine tools also got people worked up. But the most controversial items were communications equipment and computers.

Q: Were these controls instigated by orders from the Soviet Union or from one of its bloc countries, or were we trying to think ahead of them?

ROOT: Well naturally we wanted to think ahead of the order. If the order had already been placed before the controls were imposed, you were two steps behind already. The issue, frankly, on those two particular areas was that clearly they had military significance, but clearly they had broad civil applications as well. The debate often focused on how far had the Soviets gone technologically in these areas. If we removed controls all together, what would be the effect, and of course the intelligence people had input to this. Foreign availability became part of the equation as to whether an item would be controlled or not. No matter how you approach the subject, it was controversial.

Q: Did you find that other countries, say France or Germany, were getting a march on us or not?

ROOT: That did come up from time to time. Some of the U.S. manufacturers were not solely concerned with developing the market. For instance, IBM was very much concerned with its reputation as being conscientious of national security. They within their own company were more restrictive with exports to the Soviet Union than the government controls for many years. So it was never quite as simple as it looked.

Q: I would imagine. Well I mean this complexity, how long were you doing this?

ROOT: Well, I started in '64, and I stayed there five years. Then I came back to it in '76 and stayed seven more years.

Q: Well, '64 to '69. Were you considered Mr. sanctions?

ROOT: The word "sanctions" wasn't used as freely as it is today. COCOM was the buzzword, and I was sometimes known as Mr. COCOM.

Q: Did you get manufacturers or congressmen with manufacturers in their districts coming to you and saying hey come on, these are American jobs we are talking about.

ROOT: Yes, although the congressman would more likely be saying hey look, the Defense Department has a point, and we can't be selling the crown jewels to the enemy. Occasionally an exporter would mobilize support from the hill, but the congressman had to be wary of his flanks and not be too soft on security.

Q: Well you are talking about computers and communications, and of course developments in those fields were exploding and continue to explode today. It is continually changing and getting more sophisticated and more flexible and all that, and the revolution was beginning by that point wasn't it?

ROOT: Yes. We got ahead of the curve on computers by putting computers, full stop, on the control list in the early 60's, before there was a real market for them, because the Defense Department could of course, see what the potential was, as did others for that matter. But as you point out, the technology developed quickly, as did commercial as well as military applications. At some point, an item took on what was known as a commodity status. It was on the shelf. Anybody could get it. By the time it reached commodity status, there wasn't much you could really do to stop it. This was true even in the 60's for microprocessors. It was interesting. Integrated circuits were being developed along with computers, and the item on the list banned any equipment using such circuits. Well, this was the early days of micro electronics. Finally it got to the point where there were so many pieces of equipment using integrated circuits that the Commerce Department, without really getting formal clearance from anybody, just had to remove that item from the control list. This was a unilateral control at the time. This was almost unheard of. Nobody could really fault them for it, because the control of such an item was impossible to enforce.

Q: When you got to Paris were you the front person in trying to stop stuff from going back and forth? Were we trying to keep the French, the British, the Germans and others from doing business? How did you see our role?

ROOT: The United States was clearly the most restrictive in its policy toward control. On the other hand the allies realized something had to be done. It was a probing process. They would see that their particular product had a market and they would like to sell it. But they didn't know whether the Americans would stand for it or not. So they would come up with a proposal, and the Americans would say, "No, we can't take that off the list because of these significant strategic uses." They would say, "Really? Show us." Such a request was quite understandable. Sometimes, even before it got to that point, the American exporters would make the same points as the allies. In fact it was often much more difficult to get a U.S. position which required agreement of the three agencies at a minimum than it was to get 16 countries to agree.

Q: Well, it is often said true diplomacy is really waged in Washington to get the various departments on the same line. It is certainly much easier dealing with the nations abroad. Did the CIA play any role that you were aware of?

ROOT: Oh, not only was I aware of the CIA role, but they attended our meetings. Their representative would give us what they knew about the capability on the other side with this particular technology or commodity. It wasn't anything covert.

Q: No, just the practical knowledge. Were there perceived differences in outlook between the French, the Germans, and the British or maybe the Dutch?

ROOT: Well, yes. A Dutch company, Phillips, for example, had a market in medical electronics which the Dutch government tried to protect. To the extent this could be defined without letting everything go through by calling it medical, they were humored in that. The French were the most difficult to deal with, because they often presented very complicated arguments which the rest of us just didn't understand. Not only were there language differences, but the way they approached these things was different. The Germans used to have Siemens at their right hand and the British had their computer companies at their right hand. We usually were not quite as up front about having U.S. companies there, but they had their influence too.

Q: Did you have the feeling that it was the United States trying to run herd on this?

ROOT: Yes, it was clearly the United States trying to run herd, at least as they saw it. We often were pretty heavy handed about it. This was resented even to the point that the Belgians said, "This has gone too far. COCOM is supposed to work on consensus. Everybody has to agree to an objection to a sale." COCOM had a rule of unanimity to add items to the list but it worked in reverse on individual sales. All had to agree to sales and the United States often used its veto to object to sales by other countries. But when the Belgian proposal finally came to a vote, the Belgians got not support. Others realized that the COCOM system would not work unless some country disciplined the organization and no country other than the United States wanted to be the one to say "No."

Q: Did you sometimes have the feeling that you were as the phrase goes the 500 pound gorillas sitting at the table there?

ROOT: Well of course we were trying to present something less than a 500 pound gorilla. Nevertheless that was a pretty apt description.

Q: Did the Americans and the Canadians and the British or the Japanese line up on one side and the French and the Germans on another?

ROOT: Normally the alliances on a particular issue would be those countries which shared a commercial interest in the item under consideration. Seldom would there be much agreement with the United States to say, "No, you can't." There would be different combinations of countries pushing relaxation, because those who didn't have a commercial interest in a particular item weren't going to use up their political capital on that item. You seldom had groups of countries opposing each other. It was the United States that was the discipline for the organization.

Q: Were there ever any times when the United States wanted to sell something and the others said no?

ROOT: There were some times when pressures from U.S. industry were so great that the U.S. Government felt it had to compromise, sometimes getting ahead of COCOM. Whenever that happened, especially if we had previously said no to an export of the same item by another COCOM member and then turned around and permitted a U.S. export, there was all hell to pay. It was not accepted with pleasure.

Q: Where did the Japanese fit into this thing?

ROOT: The Japanese played their cards very close to the chest. They, of course, had their own interests, but they seldom would come out until the end of the negotiation to be definitive on precisely what they could accept and what they couldn't. It was a little frustrating because they wouldn't commit themselves until very late in the process. In other words they weren't going to use up their political capital until it became evident that no other country was going to accomplish their objective.

Q: Were there ever any issues where you had to agree to disagree and you said, "Oh to hell with it?"

ROOT: Yes. The COCOM members had not given up sovereignty on anything. So, if the organization, which usually meant the United States, told a country, "No, you can't do this" and if that country felt it was important to their national interest that they do it, they would say, "Sorry about that. In this particular case we are just going to have to do it anyway." This didn't happen very often though.

Q: Was most of this done behind closed doors and so there wasn't media attention?

ROOT: Everything was done behind closed doors. When COCOM was first established, even its existence was supposed to be secret. This was because of sensitivities in France and Italy because of communist participation in their governments. Of course the existence of the organization didn't remain secret more than a week or two. The actual list was not made public until the British decided to publish it. The organization never did; although the Wassenaar successor to COCOM now publishes its lists on the Internet. During COCOM days, the British came to the conclusion that industry had to know what it was. They didn't call it the COCOM list, but everybody with a need to know knew that that was what it was.

Q: When you were in Washington did you get pressure from the American embassy in Paris or in London reporting requests from the foreign ministries of those countries that the United States change its position on a COCOM case?

ROOT: Yes, that sort of thing happened. Usually it was when the United States was exercising extraterritorial jurisdiction. We insisted on controlling not only exports from the United States but also re-exports. If we had said "No objection" in COCOM and then denied a request for a re-export license for the same case, that was not appreciated, to put it mildly. There were two different U.S. bureaucracies involved. We finally had to work out an arrangement whereby the re-export license requirement was waived if COCOM had approved it. That, to this day, is still in the regulations, even though COCOM disappeared eight years ago, and its successor doesn't have the same discipline.

Q: Were we keeping a wary eye on countries like Sweden and Switzerland, who were not in the system? They were obviously getting things from all the COCOM members, maybe adding something, and then passing it on.

ROOT: The Swedish firm, Ericsson, was very much interested in exporting communications equipment. Although Sweden was not a COCOM member, Ericsson cooperated informally for two reasons. It did not wish to endanger its sales to our Defense Department and it was dependent on U.S. sources for some of the components in its equipment. Switzerland was a little different. They were primarily interested in machine tools and because of their neutrality they didn't want to become a member of such an organization. Nevertheless, they entered into a confidential side agreement under which they would not increase their exports to the East beyond historical levels. There was uncertainty as to just what "historical levels" meant; but they did cooperate generally in this way. After several decades the agreement became known publicly.

Q: How about Israel?

ROOT: Israel seldom came under discussion. There was a fascinating book that came out called Armageddon Network which was written by someone who overheard a chap from the Defense Department who was very much hawkish on export controls talking with Israeli intelligence people. The thrust of the book was that the particular defense officials who were so negative on U.S. and allied exports were really trying to protect the market for Israeli exports. I don't know if that can really be supported, but the book made quite a fascinating case of it.

Q: Did the Korean War have any influence on what was happening?

ROOT: Well that was long before my time.

Q: Excuse me, not Korea. I meant Vietnam.

ROOT: Not particularly. Vietnam was one of the proscribed countries, but there wasn't that much of a market in Vietnam for goods on COCOM lists.

Q: I was wondering if it was a factor in discussions.

ROOT: Naturally there was a lot of discussion in the hallways and at lunch, but it was not much of a factor in the administration of export controls.

Q: How about snitching? You know I can imagine say the Belgian delegate saying well I already know for a fact that the Italians have sold such and such or it has been seen in Prague or something like that. Was this a part of the ambiance?

ROOT: Well yes. Of course they wouldn't consider it snitching. If they saw something that was evidence that an allied country had sold something without obtaining the required COCOM permission, then it could get a little dicey. Often the evidence would be from a third country or perhaps it would be to the effect that, within the family, the technology had developed to such a point that, even though there were military applications, it couldn't be controlled anymore.

Q: How about oil well equipment and oil well exploration?

ROOT: That came later. There was a U.S. imposition of oil and gas equipment controls which was supposed to be a flexible tool of foreign policy. You could turn them off and on. But what actually happened, and this was in the '80s, after the imposition of martial law in Poland, more or less at the instigation of the Soviets, we cut down on oil and gas equipment which had a particular impact on the west European's desire for a natural gas pipeline. Some of the equipment came from the United States or had U.S. technology components in it. Much of it was already in western Europe. But the controls which were supposed to be a sanction against the Soviets turned out to be a sanction against our allies, because in order to enforce the U.S. controls, we had to penalize the European firms who were not abiding by those controls. This became a real donnybrook. The State Department of course, as usual, was trying to smooth things over, but it was practically impossible to smooth things over when they are so obviously at loggerheads. Finally, President Reagan went farther than any of us at State thought he would. He completely lifted them except if we could negotiate something that COCOM would agree on. They obviously weren't going to agree to control the equipment for the pipeline. The upshot of all this was that, although my boss, who was new at the job, thought it was going to be impossible to find anything that they could agree upon, we did eventually find something. By that time I had worked this for so many years I knew we could find something. There is always something out there, so we found geophones, which listened for seismic vibrations indicating the presence of oil or gas. That purpose did not meet the COCOM criteria; but geophones used the same technology as hydrophones, which are used to listen to submarines. But the hard-liners in Commerce, State, and Defense didn't want to give up the other controls. I thought the President wasn't going to appreciate this, because of the potential of putting him right back in the box he had just gotten himself out of. So I resisted this quite strenuously within the EB bureau. I was told the White House wanted it that way. I doubted that, but had no way to confirm my doubts. I thereupon resigned in 1983 and went public with my concerns. The issue never did go to the White House. The cabinet level in State and Commerce reversed their underlings and unilateral U.S. controls were not put back in place.

Q: Well we will come back to that, but during this '64-'69 period, how effective at that time did you feel our controls were?

ROOT: Well, my personal opinion didn't count for much, but there was a CIA study which concluded that controls on high priority micro electronic and semi conductor manufacturing equipment had some effect. In a public document the CIA said, in effect, "You know, they have been able to import enough equipment to make all the micro electronic and semi conductor manufacturing equipment that they need for military purposes; but it has cost them more because of these controls and slowed them down. And they didn't get technical help in learning how to use the equipment." So it was a mixed bag.

Q: Well then in '69 you left for the first time. Where did you go?

ROOT: At that time I went to Vietnam.

Q: What were you doing?

ROOT: I was with a joint State-AID outfit in Saigon dealing with transportation and communications infrastructure, most of which was developed by the U.S. military.

Q: You were there from '69 to when?

ROOT: '71.

Q: '71. We overlapped a bit then. I was consul general in the embassy '69 to '70. How did you find the AID structure and all? What was your impression of it in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well it was very artificial structure. We were pretending we were really in control, and it turned out we weren't. The usual political machinations showed up in things like rice. We wanted to sell them rice, although they had their own production capability. I wasn't concerned with that. I was, as I say, in the transportation and communication side. There it was a reasonably constructive role we were expected to play. The objective was to help the Vietnamese understand what they could reasonably maintain after we left. It would have taken their entire national budget just to maintain some of the roads we built. Roads and communications equipment were not easy to maintain. In that sense I think we made considerable progress, although it turned out, of course, that we were talking to the wrong people.

Q: What was your impression of the people you dealt with in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well, Vietnamese officials were more competent in their fields than I had expected. Naturally, they had their own interests to look out for, including at times some disturbing personal interests.

Q: We are talking about say corruption?

ROOT: Yes. Selling telephones.

Q: At the time you were there, how were you looking upon the war in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well it disturbed me. There were all kinds of protests going on back here, including those in which my own children participated. That was not so unusual. I discovered that virtually everybody I dealt with on the U.S. side in Vietnam was as disturbed as I was. We didn't seem to quite know what we were doing or what was feasible and what wasn't. Finally the incursion into Cambodia took place.

Q: This was in the spring of '70.

ROOT: Yes. I was so disturbed that the next morning when we had our usual staff meeting, and we were still talking about rice and balance or payments, I piped up and said, "I don't know about the rest of you, but it seems that maybe we ought to have some discussion about what happened yesterday." One of my colleagues said, "There goes Root with his Nuremberg defense," which wasn't exactly my idea. Eventually I did write a dissent about what we were up to in Vietnam, and I was amazed when I got back to Washington to learn that I was the only one in Vietnam who wrote such a memo. I was amazed because the vast majority of people I talked with every day felt the same way I did.

Q: In essence what was your dissent based on?

ROOT: Well of course it couldn't be based on a thorough knowledge of everything going on, because I didn't have that knowledge. But I did feel that I knew enough to at least indicate my concern. It was quite a fascinating experience. There were two options. One could either send it directly to Washington without stopping anywhere in between, or you could go through channels. I opted to go through channels, because I didn't particularly want to keep it secret. I wanted to see how it would play. There was one chap in the political section who told me that I just didn't know what was going on. Well I didn't pretend to know everything that was going on, but I didn't think they knew either.

Q: Did you get out in the field?

ROOT: Most of my work had to do with interacting with the central government people in these technical areas and with the U.S. military.

Q: You were part of the AID organization?

ROOT: It was a joint State-AID economic office.

Q: Did you have a feeling we were throwing money at a problem?

ROOT: Yes. One of the aspects that really disturbed me was a proposal to build a new airport for civil aviation use. It struck me that there were already so many airports for military use that it boggled the mind to think that the Vietnamese would need even more after we left. But the engineers could, of course, make an engineering case that it would be nice to get this or that. I kept making negative comments. This was not entirely appreciated. When it came time for my efficiency rating to be prepared, the boss said that I was stubborn. I said, "Would you mind changing that to persistent?" He said, "I'll change it to persistent, but you are stubborn." I thought that I should be stubborn on something like that.

Q: Oh, absolutely. When you left in '71, what was your personal prognosis of where things were going?

ROOT: It was pretty clear by then we were not going to prevail. It was just a matter of time.

Q: Where did you go after that?

ROOT: Then I went to West Berlin.

Q: And you were in West Berlin from when to when?

ROOT: '71 to '74.

Q: What was your job in West Berlin?

ROOT: I was the economic counselor. It was a fascinating experience because it was really three jobs: normal economic counselor, as in any post; interactions with the British and French and occasionally with the Soviets on the occupation responsibilities we still had; and struggling to cope with problems of access between West Germany and West Berlin. There were four modes of transport - air, water, rail, and highway: and the GDR made problems for all four.

Q: How was detente perceived from the perspective of Berlin?

ROOT: We arrived just at the time the four power agreement was signed. This resolved some of the issues we had with the Soviets. We left, of course, long before the wall came down. During the time I was there it was a claustrophobic atmosphere, being hemmed in. The German authorities in Berlin and the German authorities in Bonn sometimes chafed at allied restrictions and oversight. Naturally we had common interests, but not always the same emphases on what was important.

Q: In a way, particularly in economics, including transportation, you were almost the keeper of what I would call the holy bible. That is how far tailgates could be lowered. There was almost a theology about dealing with Berlin. The main thing was, as I understand it, any little relaxation of our insistence on our rights would be used by the Soviets to ask for more, so we had to be very rigorous on this, or we felt we did. Was that the case when you were there?

ROOT: Oh, yes. Not quite as pronounced as you put it. Actually there seemed to me to be opportunities for relaxing the restrictions on us that we weren't taking advantage of. One of the restrictions was the 10,000 foot ceiling on the air corridors. It was much more expensive if you had to fly that low. We had, of course, through various stratagems, made a deal with the GDR without really dealing with them if you know what I mean.

Q: We at that time did not have relations.

ROOT: No relations. But through the Soviets we could influence things occasionally. I thought I saw an opportunity to raise that ceiling, but I never got anywhere with it.

Q: Who was our minister then?

ROOT: David Klein.

Q: What was his background?

ROOT: He was an ambitious chap for wanting to become an ambassador if I could put it that way. He was, that led him to want to provide impeccable service to visitors from Washington. The irony of it was that there were so many of them he couldn't do that for everybody. So, when a governor from an obscure southern state came through with his wife, he let that one go. The most junior man on my staff became control officer for Jimmy Carter and Rosalyn.

Q: You were getting together with the French and British representatives all the time?

ROOT: Oh, yes, we had regular meetings.

Q: Were you pretty much all singing out of the same hymnbook?

ROOT: Pretty much, but there were some minor differences of opinion. The occupation still continued but there were only a few things we were supposed to do, such as munitions control.

Q: Had the situation reached maturity? Was the time of testing of both sides in the past? Had every nuance been played out?

ROOT: Not entirely. As part of the four power agreement, the Soviets obtained authority to open a commercial mission iWest Berlin. I was named as the U.S. liaison for that mission, so this was something new. They didn't know quite what to do, and I didn't know quite what to do, so we were feeling our way. It wasn't as if everything had been worked out.

Q: What was it supposed to do?

ROOT: It was supposed to be carrying out the normal function of providing opportunities for Soviet trade.

Q: Was there much of an opportunity?

ROOT: No.

Q: I was going to say, I mean at that time West Berlin had quite thorough access to the rest of western Europe didn't they?

ROOT: Well, yes, although it was heavily dependent on subsidies from Bonn. It was not self-sufficient.

Q: Was Berlin building up reserves so in case there was a shutdown, things could go on at least for awhile?

ROOT: Well there might have been some reserves as a heritage of the blockade, which was long before we were there, but there was no great political push to build them up. Things were relatively quiet I'd say.

Q: Was there much in the way of concern about spying?

ROOT: Well, interestingly enough, Felix Bloch worked for me.

Q: Oh. You had better explain who Felix Bloch is.

ROOT: Felix Bloch was a commercial officer on my staff. Several years later it was alleged that he had passed secrets to the KGB.

Q: This was when he was in Vienna I guess or Paris.

ROOT: It was in Paris. He had served in Vienna. Two members of the fourth estate contacted me, one for newspaper reporter and one television reporter. They had both figured out that I was his boss in West Berlin. So they asked me, "Was he a spy?" I said, "No, not to my knowledge. His particular job as commercial officer had less to do with the east than anything else in the Berlin mission. He later went on, when he wasn't working for me, to the eastern affairs division which did have reason to contact the East Germans. Both of these gentlemen called me a second time six months later. Each had read a book which alleged that hundreds of people, including Bloch, worked for the CIA. The reporters were sophisticated enough not to take that at face value. So they asked me whether it was possible that maybe he was working for the CIA and that the FBI and the CIA weren't talking to each other. I said, "There are three kinds of people who work for the CIA: the ones that make no bones about it and are completely open about it; those whose cover is so thin that everybody knows but pretends they don't; and others whose cover is so deep that nobody knows. He was not in either of the first two categories. If he is in the third category, I would have no way of knowing." So I wasn't very much help to them. But what surprised me is that, although these reporters contacted me, I was never asked this or any other question by any one in the U.S. Government - the diplomatic security people at State or the FBI or anyone else. He was denied his pension even though he was never charged with, let alone convicted of, any criminal act. I have attempted to help him get his pension restored.

Q: It is one of these things that is in limbo and is curious. Allegations were made that are serious and seemed to be somewhat substantiated. He didn't challenge them; he didn't confess, so nothing happened except I guess he was discharged, and pension was taken away, and he could have challenged that.

ROOT: When he resigned in July of '90, he thought he was going to get his pension. Then the Department took it away. He filed countless grievances and then took it to the court. It is still not resolved.

Q: While you were in Berlin was there not considerable spying activity?

ROOT: We, of course, had our own CIA people. And the Eastern Affairs Division in the mission in West Berlin was doing its best to figure out what was happening in the GDR. These were normal activities. As for cloak and dagger stuff, there probably was some of that going on, but not to my knowledge.

Q: How did we gather information about the German Democratic Republic?

ROOT: As an example, there was an international commercial fair in Leipzig every six months. Several of us in the U.S. mission managed to get to Leipzig for the fair by a device where the Soviets issued us a separate piece of paper on which the GDR had put its stamp so we could travel, but it wasn't in our passports. Once we got to Leipzig, we could get a visa extension to go to other places. In this way we managed to see some things going on in East Germany even though we didn't recognize the GDR.

Q: How did we use the Leipzig fair?

ROOT: This was an opportunity to see what eastern countries were producing. With respect to my own job, we tried to determine whether eastern technology was up to the level in the West. Amateurs like myself could only get an impression, but at least we found out what was being exhibited. This is what one normally does at a trade fair. The Leipzig fair was one of the biggest ones in the east. The political side of the U.S. mission in West Berlin used the fair as an excuse to get around the countryside and see what was going on.

Q: Did we not take, as an article of faith, that the east German economy was producing better things than other Warsaw Pact countries?

ROOT: That was indeed the conventional wisdom. When Germany was eventually united, however, it turned out that, compared to West Germany, they were eons behind, so everything is relative.

Q: Well in a way, you know, I was talking about how we approach things. Maybe we were looking for something and we over estimated what the East Germans were doing.

ROOT: We might have been over estimating, but none of us thought they were up to western standards. On the other hand, compared with Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary, they were relatively advanced.

Q: Was it easy to get in and out of West Berlin to get to Germany?

ROOT: We could drive on only the one autobahn that went to Helmstedt. Vienna, as you know is south and east of Berlin, but to get there we had to travel west and then much farther east. It was a very long detour; but nonetheless it could be done. Or you could fly, or take a sealed train. You could not leave the train while it was in the GDR. Those were the three methods of access for personnel.

Q: You say you felt a little bit claustrophobic at times.

ROOT: Yes, you couldn't drive more than 15 or 20 minutes in any direction without running into the wall.

Q: What about relations with the economic section in Bonn, the American economic section in our embassy there. Were you an independent offshoot, or were you part and parcel of the economic section? How did that work?

ROOT: Well, the people in Bonn were working with the German government in Bonn on these access questions. We would provide data that was more accessible in Berlin, but we weren't the negotiating partners. We sometimes worked out local issues with the Berlin authorities. There wasn't a need for extremely close working relationship because it was pretty clearly defined who did what.

Q: By the time you left there in '74, was there any intonation that the whole bloc system and the Soviet Union might you know, be running towards the end of its days?

ROOT: Not the slightest.

Q: Anybody ever raise that?

ROOT: No. We all spent so many years with the cold war mentality that it just didn't come up on the radar screen at all.

Q: Well then, '74 where did you go?

ROOT: Then I went to the OES Bureau, to the other side of the street. This was during the so-called detente period in the Nixon administration. Whenever he had a summit meeting with the Soviets, they had to agree on something, and it usually ended up being an agreement to cooperate in science and technology. Somebody had to decide what it meant after the agreement was signed. It was our bureau that managed the workings of these agreements. We find people who would travel back and forth and decide what the projects were. It wasn't as if this came from the bottom up. The grass roots had not insisted that we had to have such agreements. It came from top down. Even so, it was fascinating, because there were things that we could get together with the Soviets on productively.

Q: What sort of things do you recall?

ROOT: We of course, were particularly anxious to find things where they were ahead of us, so it wasn't all a one way street. The conventional wisdom had it that this was just a means whereby they could get for free some of our technology. The export control restrictions were still in effect, so whatever we did in these delegations could not involve transfer of technologies identified on the export control list. A notable area in which they could help us was metallurgy. They had developed various metallurgical processes that were ahead of ours. So this was one of the more popular projects on the U.S. side. A few years later in 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, all this came to a screeching halt. There were two commercial contracts that were pending at that time. One had already been signed by U.S. Steel and Nippon Steel to construct a steel mill at Novolipetsk. The other was an Alcoa deal to build an aluminum smelter in Smolensk. The U.S. government immediately put a stop to both contracts and tried to strengthen international export controls on metallurgy, even though this was the one area where they were ahead of us. It was very weird.

Q: Were you off by yourselves on this? Did people say something like "You people will have to work this out as well as you can"?

ROOT: In the scientific and technical cooperation?

Q: Yes.

ROOT: The technical experts who were recruited for these delegations developed a real enthusiasm. Of course it was a wonderful travel experience. They learned a lot. I am sure the Soviet and East Europeans were also eager. So there was a vigor and an energy to the thing from these participants. But the program didn't get a great deal of press play. It wasn't all that well known that this was going on. Of course the agreements themselves got in the news because of the President's involvement. There were still unreconstructed cold warriors who worried about the technology going. But efforts to stop any technology transfer were unsuccessful.

Q: President Carter came in in 1977 with the idea that you could do business. He sent a businessman, Arthur Watson to Moscow. You know there was an attempt to change the dynamics in a way.

ROOT: By that time I was back in the East West Trade office.

Q: When did you go back?

ROOT: '76.

Q: Well, what happened there? There was an East West Trade office fro'76 to '85 right?

ROOT: It was an office that had two parts which I called the yes part and the no part. The no part was concerned with export controls. In the yes part we were negotiating trade agreements with China, Hungary, and Romania just as if they were normal countries until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. After that, there was no more business for the yes part and the no part expanded. There were all these sanctions under the Carter Administration, the grain embargo and all that. So the yes part became not simply more no but hell no, because there was a great deal of political insistence that we punish the Soviet Union economically.

Q: Having had your experience of five years before in COCOM, did you find that, from '76 to December of '79, things had relaxed considerably on controls?

ROOT: Well, some things had in technical terms. For instance, computer controls had to be relaxed. Integrated circuit controls had to be relaxed, as I mentioned earlier.

Q: Because they were off the shelf?

ROOT: Not only most integrated circuits but also most computers became shelf items. It was impossible to control them, so computer speed limit and memory size limit had to be progressively raised. But it was always way behind the technical development. Technology was proceeding at a much faster rate than the revisions of export controls.

Q: Was there a change in attitude there say prior to December of '79?

ROOT: Well prior to '79 it wasn't all that much different from the 60's, when I was there before. The debate had moved to a different level of technology, but we were still arguing about computers and communications.

Q: Were you getting marching orders from the Carter to loosen up?

ROOT: Not particularly. It was my experience, and I was in the business through many administrations both Republican and Democrat, that the change of administration seldom meant much difference. There were certain individual congressmen or senators or bureaucrats or agencies that could be pretty much be depended upon to be either for or against the export control issue of the time. But something like Afghanistan or detente had more of an effect than a change of administration. Even detente didn't change the controls much. As I mentioned earlier it was in the State Department one of these strange functions that didn't have a parallel. Nobody paid a great deal of attention to it.

Q: Were you still meeting in Paris?

ROOT: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you find that the attitude of the Europeans and the Japanese had changed much?

ROOT: Not particularly. The big development in '76 was a report prepared by Fred Bucy, CEO of Texas Instruments, to the effect that it was more important to control microprocessor production technology than to control microprocessors.

Q: This was Texas Instruments.

ROOT: Yes. TI wanted to restrict the ability of its competitors to sell the technology to manufacture products which TI wanted to sell. The Bucy report used a security rather than a commercial argument. This security argument was written into the '79 version of the Export Administration Act. This was the new development, what do we do about technology to produce these things. There was emphasis on that. The other side of the coin about removing controls on microprocessors didn't move quite as fast as the addition of production technology controls.

Q: What about the Japanese? Were they at that time beginning to move into the field? Were they taking particular interest in microprocessors?

ROOT: They maintained the interest they had in the 60's. It certainly didn't abate, but I wouldn't say it increased all that much. Some of their proposals would reflect what they were then able to export, so to that extent you could see that Japan's emergence as a major economic power was reflected. The way they played export controls didn't change much.

Q: During this period the United States was regularizing its relations with China. How did this affect export controls?

ROOT: During and shortly after the Korean War, China was treated more restrictively than the USSR, because China was a belligerent in that war. But in 1957 the British led COCOM to remove this adverse China differential. Of course U.S. China relations did not start to thaw until 15 years later, in 1972. In the 80's when Reagan came on board, there was a desire to treat China more liberally than the Soviets, i.e., to "play the China card," as it was called. What the Reagan administration people on high wanted to do was to make it clear that the Chinese were going to be treated more favorably with respect to export controls. The idea was to help to contain the Soviets. However, nothing happened. The Defense Department continued to object to any exports to China having a military potential. This went back and forth for months, I guess even years, with the President getting more and more insistent to play the China card and nothing happening. Finally senior State Department officials came to me and asked, "What can we do?" I said, "It is simple. You make a list of items that you are willing to sell to the Chinese but not to the Soviets and authorize Commerce to approve exports of those items to China without any review by the Defense Department. Top levels of the Defense Department were saluting the President and agreed that there had to be a procedure to relieve their subordinates from the box they were in. The regulations were revised in 1979 to permit shipping some items of military significance to the Chinese military. The list of items that could go to China and not to the Soviet Union was called the green line. Much later, when the Soviet Union broke up, there was no more favorable treatment to China compared with the Soviet Union. The green line list remained but it affected very few cases. Technology had progressed in the intervening 12 years, so that there wasn't much substance left.

Q: After the Afghan invasion by the Soviets in December of '79, was there almost a complete shutdown?

ROOT: There was an effort to shut down. The Defense Department came to Commerce and said we should stop exporting in 10 militarily significant industrial sectors. Commerce looked at these sectors and concluded that they covered virtually the entire economy. But there was no consensus to impose a complete embargo. So the ten industrial sectors were narrowed to just one, metallurgy. This sector was selected, because of the cancellation of the steel mill and aluminum smelter contracts. These contracts were canceled immediately after the invasion because of a political imperative to take some clearly visible actions. But metallurgy controls had little substance because of Soviet capabilities in this field. In response to an urgent request to do more, I came up with a new formula called "no exceptions." Normally, items on the agreed control list could, on an exceptional basis, be exported to the East if COCOM members agreed to each such sale. Under "no exceptions" COCOM would not agree to any exceptional exports to the Soviet Union. This policy lasted for years, almost until the Soviet Union disappeared. I think it lasted until '87.

Q: As things progressed past '79, the Reagan administration came in. This must have at least initially been seen as, you know, a right wing government that was really going to clamp down on things.

ROOT: Well, some might have seen it that way. In fact what happened was that the very first thing that Reagan did was to lift the grain embargo which Carter had imposed. This didn't have much to do with COCOM, which controlled only strategic technology, but it was a straw in the wind. It indicated that Reagan was not going to be tougher than Carter. In fact he was going to be more relaxed in some respects than Carter, which probably most people didn't appreciate at the time, but that is what actually was happening.

Q: As this moved on you were saying this pipeline thing became a real issue didn't it? What were the issues?

ROOT: It started out with Sam Huntington, an advisor from Harvard. In the early 1970's, he advocated controls on the export of oil and gas equipment as a flexible tool of foreign policy. Of course we were leaders in the field and the Soviets were eager recipients of this technology. They had a lot of oil and gas they wanted to extract using the best available technology. Interestingly, none of the agencies, not even the Defense Department, supported the idea at that time. Indeed, one of the detente agreements involved cooperation in oil and gas technology. During a hearing, a Congressman asked me how we could possibly justify helping the Soviets develop oil and gas for their military establishment. I responded that the Soviets were producing much more oil and gas than their military could possibly consume. They were net exporters of oil and gas. The Congressman didn't realize this. But he was very much aware of problems in obtaining oil from the Middle East, including a 1973 embargo and subsequent price increases. He said, "I would deal with the devil himself under those circumstances." That was still the attitude even in the Defense Department when Huntington first made his proposal. Huntington was almost all by himself at that point. But he eventually prevailed. The next time there was a crisis with the Soviets, the White House over ruled all of us at the working level and directed that these controls go into effect. It was a very inflexible tool when the controls were invoked to try to stop Western Europeans from using U.S. equipment and technology to help the USSR build a pipeline to deliver natural gas to the West. The U.S. objective was to show displeasure because of Soviet pressure on Poland to impose martial law in response to Solidarity activity.

Q: The declaration of martial law.

ROOT: That was the issue where Huntington finally prevailed. But even then, those at the working level in all three departments (State, Commerce, and Defense) were very skeptical about it. Then it turned into this brouhaha with the allies about the pipeline.

Q: Well by this time were you seeing these various tools as having much effect. In other words, you know, did this make sense?

ROOT: It had a tremendous unintended effect in the pipeline case. It made no sense as I saw it. The pipeline was going forward with this equipment because the western Europeans did not respect our unilateral controls. The Soviets must have been laughing at us. It was a complete disaster as far as I could tell.

Q: What was the problem; there was nobody to say boy this sure isn't working or something like that.

ROOT: It was obvious it wasn't working. It finally got to the point where the President couldn't look the other way. You know Reagan had a reputation of not being all that sophisticated in matters of this sort. Maybe that is just as well., I mean he apparently concluded that, if it was not working, we should undo it. So there you have it.

Q: It got to a certain point to say how did this come up with you showing your stubbornness I guess.

ROOT: We had to enforce the rules. Commerce was enforcing its rules but State is part of the government and these were government rules. We couldn't ignore them, and they were put in effect by usual government procedures. So when the British and French and Germans and Italians were all ignoring our entreaties and proceeding in violation of our rules, the State Department couldn't say no, you can't do this when Commerce said we have to deny them export privileges or whatever the enforcement was. It got more and more- (end of tape)

It became obvious that part of the way, part of the procedure to get us out of the untenable position was to change the rules. There wasn't any way short of that that would work.

Q: With this going all the way back, was there sort of a secondary punishment? In other words, did we punish American firms whose equipment or technology was being used contrary to our controls?

ROOT: If the American firm was exporting without a license they were in trouble, assuming that a license was clearly required. Sometimes that was in debate.

Q: But the American firm might have supplied a British firm under an approved license and later the British firm might have included these U.S. components in something sent to the USSR because the British government did not share the U.S. government view that such an export should not take place. Would the American firm suffer?

ROOT: If the American firm was in collusion with the British decision it could suffer, but in most cases the British would have enough sense not to involve them with collusion if they didn't want to unnecessarily get the American firm into trouble. Sometimes the American firm would get into PR trouble. For example, during the apartheid days, Firestone was embarrassed by a picture showing Firestone tires on a South African police car. But American companies do not get into legal trouble if they follow U.S. rules and are not complicit in another party's violation of those rules.

Q: Well, during this time, '76 to '83, were there other sanctions being laid on other countries, or was this strictly western controls on exports to the communist bloc?

ROOT: There were lots of sanctions involving other countries. South Africa was one example. There had been lots of sanctions for many years.

Q: This raises a question. Here you are sitting in the middle of this web of sanctions. It seems to be a very easy tool for Congress or somebody if they are concerned about a country to whip out these sanctions. Were we in the State Department trying to stop this because sanctions are not very effective and just hurt American firms?

ROOT: In reaction to Afghanistan for instance, it was obvious there was going to be a problem with the grain embargo. This no doubt was mentioned, however that was imposed practically within 24 hours from on high, I mean from the White House. The departments had little left to do except salute and try to implement it. That is usually the way these things work. There is a crisis which demands immediate action. You can't send in the marines for obvious reasons, and jawboning isn't enough, so they start talking about sanctions within 24 hours almost invariably. It is usually not a question of congressional mandate; that often comes later. The Cuban embargo was strictly executive action, although years later the Congress decided to legislate it.

Q: Did your office review and report on the effectiveness of the Cuban and South African embargoes?

ROOT: My office was deeply involved with reviews and reports on South African cases. Commerce administered license procedures and the South African desk weighed in on the political ramifications. My office was the liaison with Commerce. So we tried to reconcile differing opinions held by Commerce and the South African desk. There were lots of details to work out.

Q: What would the South African desk be after?

ROOT: They would not want things to go to military or police entities. Then the question would arise what is a military or police entity? So you would have to go back and define it. We were involved in that kind of detail.

Q: Were you getting information from INR or CIA as to the final disposition of U.S. exports to South Africa. For example, if a U.S. company got an order from XYZ company in South Africa for raincoats. How did you know that those raincoats weren't going to end up in the hands of South African policemen?

ROOT: If the XYZ company was a subsidiary of a military or police entity and it was on the list, then that was definitive. If it wasn't, then the raincoats would not be picked up. I must say that the government did a better job in regularizing and defining such matters for the South African controls than for controls affecting other countries. For example, exporters are given no guidance in interpreting rules permitting exports to civil but not to military end-uses or end-users in other countries. So the exporter must make his own judgment as to whether a transaction is civil or military. These are left over cold war controls and apply to the eastern countries. There were such intense pressures both for and against exporting to South Africa that the government had to define what was military or police.

Q: I would imagine that you would be besieged by persons complaining about every decision you made, or opinion you advanced, regarding South Africa. In particular, those who wanted a complete embargo must have been unhappy with any liberal decision or opinion.

ROOT: Well, of course those that wanted a complete embargo never got it. So it was easy to defend liberalization for something that had not been identified for selective controls short of a complete embargo. There still was debate of course. Sometimes the argument would be that a particular firm was either on, or omitted from, a list by mistake. Such lists turn out to be living documents.

Q: Well, with Cuba in a way, it was fairly simple isn't it? There was almost a complete embargo.

ROOT: Relatively simple although whenever there was a new reason to get angry with Cuba, somebody wants to tighten the sanctions even though there was not much left to tighten. So maybe you cut off all tourism. There were always a few things that were left hanging.

Q: What was the basic issue that caused you to resign?

ROOT: Well there were two issues. One was the pipeline as I mentioned. I felt that I was in an impossible position being asked to collaborate in the imposition of unilateral controls which would put us right back in the pipeline imbroglio. The other issue had to do with computers, and this was a COCOM issue. The pipeline wasn't. The computer controls were hopelessly out of date. They had a speed limit and a memory size limit that were by that time almost ten years out of date and completely unenforceable. The basis for updating the computer controls was pretty apparent. When they were put into effect, those were the only two parameters of concern. Since then other bases for control had been developed, such as fault tolerance and micro-programmability. So the rational basis for updating the controls was to tighten them by adding these new parameters and to relax them by raising the limits for the old parameters. It wasn't that you wanted to relax the speed and the memory size. After ten years they couldn't possibly be controlled at those limits. Well, in '81 we were about ready to do this, and the Defense Department was adamantly opposed about relaxing anything. Bill Perry was over there at the time at a very high level.

Q: Later Secretary of Defense, yes.

ROOT: Well, he was a deputy at the time. I had the opportunity to ask him, "Would you prefer to keep things the way they are without strengthening in these new gimmicks, or is it important enough to get the new gimmicks on the list to compromise on the speed and memory size?" He said, "Given the political situation now, better just to leave it the way it is." I could accept that, but two years later Perry was no longer in that job, and I had access only to the next level down. They said, "It is unacceptable to relax the speed and memory size. But it is also unacceptable not to get the new parameters added to the list." In other words, they were insisting on something that was totally impossible to negotiate. They had led me down this garden path. They had provided no such guidance for the two years we were negotiating this in COCOM. When you are negotiating the details, you put unresolved issues in brackets and each delegation then goes back to its government to determine how it wishes to proceed. This draft was the culmination of two more years of negotiating following the two years which preceded the Perry decision. Defense didn't utter a peep during the two years since the Perry decision in spite of our repeated requests for comment. It finally came to the point where we had to get a definitive U.S. position. Since the Defense position was totally non-negotiable, I decided that things had gotten to such an unsatisfactory state that I couldn't continue to carry out my responsibilities. There was no way it could be done. There were other factors. My name was on a hit list which appeared in an article by Richard Viguerie in a magazine called Human Events. This was a list of people in the government who the author thought should be removed from their official responsibilities because they didn't have the proper attitude.

Q: This was during the Reagan period?

ROOT: High officials in the Reagan administration shared those views. William McCormick was assistant secretary for EB at the time, courtesy of Jesse Helms. He brought in a deputy assistant whose only function was to supervise my office. I went to this chap and said, "Set's face up to it. There is no point in both of us having the same job description. Do you want me to do anything, or are you going to take it over?" Well that was a little too much for him to take, but it was obvious they were trying to get me out. There were big names on that list, like Alexander Haig, so I was hardly alone. But, by that time, Haig had already been pushed out, as had several others. So it was not just substantive issues which pushed me to resign. If it hadn't been this, they would have found something else.

Q: Well you left when?

ROOT: September of '83.

Q: What, if anything, were you able to accomplish by resigning?

ROOT: As I mentioned earlier, the Secretaries of State and Commerce reversed the proposals of their assistants to reimpose unilateral oil and gas equipment controls. A year after I resigned, COCOM adopted the computer compromise I had negotiated. At the time of my resignation I wrote an open letter to the President and provided copies to those who should have had an interest. It got some press play. I was very pleased with what the Post reporter, Stuart Auerbach, did. But I was utterly amazed at the irresponsibility of the New York Times reporter, Clyde Farnsworth. He was irate that I would not give him the exclusive story; but I could not do that, because I had already talked to Auerbach. He then wrote a story which was entirely contrary to my position. He didn't even have the courtesy to put his own name to the article. He put somebody else's name on it. I wrote to the Times complaining but they paid no attention to that. I just couldn't quite believe what was happening.

Q: What did you do when you left?

ROOT: I was asked by a number of private groups to speak as to what was going on here. I was also asked by Senator Nunn to appear before his committee as to why I had left. This was the next spring. The government, of course, would have nothing to do with me for a number of years, but shortly after I left a new industry organization known as the Industry Coalition of Technology Transfer, or ICOTT. What prompted the formation of ICOTT was the plan of the government to impose controls on west-west technology transfers. This plan was inspired by the Bucy report. It would have greatly complicated the activities of multinational corporations with subsidiaries or branches in other western countries. ICOTT was very much interested in having my participation in their group. So I have maintained my collaboration with ICOTT for the past 20 years. The present members have forgotten why it was established. By about '85 or '86, the government had forgotten why I had resigned, and so I became a member of a technical advisory committee advising the government on export control regulations and procedures. I have also been doing this for about 20 years.

Q: Have you noticed any change in the use of sanctions and their effectiveness?

ROOT: Well of course, I was fascinated by the political debate in Congress at the time of Desert Storm when the Democrats said, "Well, not so fast, let's give sanctions a chance to see if we can get Iraq out of Kuwait without using military force." This military force was eventually approved in Congress by a very split vote. Many Democrats were still pushing for sanctions. The conventional wisdom has it that the sanctions would not have worked. Look at what has happened since. We have kept the sanctions in place. They had no effect on Saddam Hussein. I don't know whether that is definitive evidence or not. Saddam Hussein did offer to withdraw from Kuwait before we had fired a shot; but we did not put that offer to the test. Sanctions have been used as a major part of U.S. reaction to just about every crisis, both before and after I resigned. The effort to remove or relax Cuban controls has gotten nowhere. The North Korean embargo lasted from the Korean War of course, 1950 up until the big deal about the light water reactor in the mid '90s. But even after that deal, which promised that we would remove our embargo, it took two or three years before it was done. It was done very grudgingly, lots of items previously uncontrolled except to embargoed countries were added to the list just for exports to North Korea. So it certainly has not been a period when the concept of sanctions has gone away.

Q: Do you find yourself being used as the person who talks for sanctions or against sanctions?

ROOT: There are maybe some who would like to use me either for or against. My own position is that sanctions are often ineffective in accomplishing or furthering their stated purpose. On the other hand, sometimes they are effective in keeping us from doing something that would be worse. Sometimes the military option would have gotten us into deep trouble, and the sanction trouble is not quite that deep. Sanctions are not entirely negative.

Q: There is the American thing, "Don't just stand there; do something." It is a hell of a lot better to sanction than to fire.

ROOT: That's right. I have been amazed that sanctions weren't used in the Kosovo situation more than they were. The oil embargo was pretty effective on overland routes, but oil was still coming into Yugoslavia by sea. Of course, not being in the government, I no longer have any inside information. But I attend many seminars and symposia and ask officials why didn't we stop the oil going in before we started to bomb? I get fascinating answers. One was the French wouldn't have stood for it. So I asked the French, and the French said the Soviets wouldn't have stood for it. But I can't imagine that if we had put it to the French and the Soviets that either you cooperate on the oil embargo or we bomb, that they would have refused to cooperate. Then I asked General Nash who was chief military man on the ground, and he said, "We should have stopped the oil."

Q: Well, Bill, this has been a very fun conversation. I have learned a lot more about sanctions, which are, of course, a major tool of American diplomacy. Whether they should be or not, as you have said, is open to question. It depends on the issue, but certainly...

ROOT: They played a role in the peaceful resolution of apartheid troubles iSouth Africa.

Q: Great. Thank you very much.

End of interview